CORE THOUGHT

Handout: Common Data Collection Methods

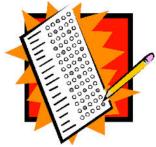|	
Logs and Tally Sheets	**Characteristics:** A form used for counting or tracking and recording the amount of something.
	Advantages: Easy way to count outputs or compile either output or outcome data.
	Constraints: Doesn't measure change.
Questionnaires/Surveys	**Characteristics:** Surveying involves gathering information from individuals using a questionnaire especially when need to quickly and/or easily get a lot of information from people in a nonthreatening way.
	Advantages: Surveys can reach a large number of respondents, generate standardized, quantifiable, empirical data - as well as qualitative data. Some people feel more comfortable responding to a survey than participating in an interview. Can offer confidentiality / anonymity. Can be inexpensive. No interviewer bias. Many sample questionnaires already exist.
	Constraints: Subject to misinterpretation depending on how questions are designed and asked. Samples must be carefully selected to ensure statistical meaning. Poor response rates. Unable to probe for additional details. Good survey questions are hard to write.
Standardized Tests	**Characteristics:** Standardized tests are designed in such a way that the questions, conditions for administering, scoring procedures, and interpretations are consistent and are administered and scored in a predetermined, standard manner.
	Advantages: Objective in nature. Often scored by computers or at the very least scored by people who do not directly know the student. Developed by experts and each question undergoes an intense process to remove bias. Permits reliable comparison of outcomes across all test takers.
	Constraints: Evaluates a student's performance on one particular day and does not take into account external factors. Many people do not perform well on tests. Availability of results may not align with reporting deadlines.
Program Developed Pre/Post Tests	**Characteristics:** Pre- and post-tests developed by a program to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, or behavior before and after participating in an intervention. An alternative to standardized tests.
	Advantages: Can show that change occurred.
	Constraints: Cannot conclusively demonstrate change occurred because of the intervention. The changes may have occurred because of other reasons.
Interviews	**Characteristics:** Interviewing involves asking respondents a series of open-ended questions. Useful when you want to fully understand someone's impressions or experiences.
	Advantages: Can generate both standardized quantifiable data, and more in-depth qualitative data. Ability to probe. Good response rate. Respondent involvement.
	Constraints: Complexities of people and communication can create many opportunities for miscommunication and misinterpretation. Potential for interviewer bias in asking or recording answers. No confidentiality for respondent.

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Focus Groups	**Characteristics:** Focus groups are a way to explore a topic in depth through group discussion, e.g. about reactions to an experience or suggestion, understanding common complaints, etc.
	Advantages: Good idea generator (brainstorming). Quickly and reliably get common impressions. Can be efficient way to get good range and depth of information in a short time.
	Constraints: Does not provide valid information at the individual level. The information is not representative of other groups. Can be expensive. Individual(s) may dominate or sidetrack the discussion and adversely affect overall results. Recruiting is limited - participants must be able to attend and therefore limited to those who have time, and work or live nearby. Data analysis is time consuming.
Observations	**Characteristics:** Observation relies on the data collectors' ability to gather data though their senses using a checklist or protocol.
	Advantages: Can collect data where and when an event or activity is occurring. Does not rely on people's willingness to provide information. Can directly see what people do rather than relying on what they say they do.
	Constraints: Does not increase understanding of why people behave the way they do. Requires skilled observer(s) and a shared understanding of the items on the observation checklist. People can act differently if they know they are being observed and observations can be tainted by a data collector's perceptions. . Not realistic for use with large groups.
Rubrics	**Characteristics:** Commonly used in education. A rubric is a checklist that the student can use to make sure they are accomplishing what is expected of them, as well as help teachers grade much more efficiently. Rubrics are typically used as a scoring tool for constructed response items, as well as performance-based tasks. A good rubric describes different levels of success in meeting this benchmark and awards points accordingly.
	Advantages: Rubrics keep grades/scores objective. Everyone is scored the same because set scoring components are laid out from the start. Once rubric exists saves time. Requires teacher to set and define more precisely the criteria used in the grading process**.** Students are able to self-assess their own work prior to submitting it.
	Constraints: Can be very time consuming to create. Can be difficult to come up with the appropriate language for the rubric so that the expectations are very clear. Rubrics often require much revision in order to use them easily. Rubrics only take into account the finished product. Unless make a point to include credit for effort and time, then most rubrics won't count these elements.
Secondary Data	**Characteristics:** Data someone else has collected such as city, state or federal agencies, etc.
	Advantages: No need to reinvent the wheel. If someone has already found the data, can take advantage of it. Even if you have to pay for access, often it is cheaper in terms of money than collecting your own data. When especially a government agency has collected the data, incredible amounts of time and money went into it. It's probably highly accurate
	Constraints: Data is restricted to what already exists – not flexible. Information may be inapplicable, disorganized, unavailable or out of date. Information may be incomplete or inaccurate. Can be time consuming to collect, review, and analyze many documents.